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C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 170561

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SUBJECT: INTSUM 600 - JULY 6, 1978

LONDON FOR KINSOLVING
PARIS FOR NICHOLAS MURPHY
OTHER ADDRESSEES FOR CHIEFS OF MISSION

1. LEBANON. FOREIGN MINISTER BOUTROS WENT TO DAMASCUS YESTERDAY TO DISCUSS THE EXPLOSIVE BEIRUT SITUATION WITH ASSAD AND KHADDAM. MEANWHILE, THE FIGHTING IN THE LEBANESE CAPITAL SEEMED TO TAPER OFF IN THE AFTERNOON, BUT RESUMED IN THE EVENING AFTER BOUTROS' RETURN TO BEIRUT.

2. THE SYRIANS USED THE TALKS TO EMPHASIZE THEIR SUPPORT FOR THE SARKIS GOVERNMENT. A SUBSEQUENT ACCOUNT OF THE DISCUSSIONS BY THE SYRIAN NEWS AGENCY HIGHLIGHTED SYRIA'S POSITION THAT ITS EFFORTS IN LEBANON WERE DIRECTED AT HELPING THE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT REASSERT ITS AUTHORITY. THE BROADCAST DECRIED "UNCONTROLLED ELEMENTS" WHICH WERE "CREATING DISTURBANCES." THE ANNOUNCEMENT IN BEIRUT THAT AL-HOSS WOULD VISIT SYRIA SHORTLY SEEMS TO BE ANOTHER EFFORT TO STRESS COOPERATION BETWEEN THE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT AND SYRIA.

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3. SYRIAN PRESS COMMENTARIES IN RECENT DAYS HAVE PLAYED UP THE SAME THEMES. THE TONE OF EDITORIALS HAS BEEN BITTERLY ANTI-PHALANGE AND ANTI-SHAMOUN AND HAS STRONGLY INDICATED THAT DAMASCUS WILL BROOK NO FURTHER CHRISTIAN TROUBLEMAKING FOR THE SARKIS REGIME. SYRIA'S SUPPORT FOR SARKIS, HOWEVER, CONFRONTS DAMASCUS WITH A DILEMMA. ON THE ONE HAND, THE SYRIANS, FOR THE PRESENT AT LEAST, APPARENTLY SEE NO ALTERNATIVE TO SARKIS AS PRESIDENT. MOREOVER, HE POSES NO OBSTACLE TO SYRIA'S WISHES IN LEBANON. ON THE OTHER HAND, EVEN THE SYRIANS IN THE PAST EXPRESSED DISPLEASURE OVER SARKIS' LACK OF BACKBONE, PERCEIVING THIS AS ONE CAUSE OF LEBANON'S CONTINUED INSTABILITY. ASSAD PROBABLY SOUGHT TO EMPHASIZE TO BOUTROS YESTERDAY THE NEED FOR A STRONGER STANCE BY THE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT.

4. MEANWHILE, SYRIAN PATIENCE WITH THE PHALANGE AND SHAMOUNISTS APPEARS TO HAVE ALL BUT RUN OUT. SYRIAN FOREIGN MINISTRY OFFICIAL SIAGE UNDERSCORED A TOUGH SYRIAN ATTITUDE IN A CONVERSATION WITH EMBASSY DAMASCUS YESTERDAY. SIAGE DESCRIBED THE "IMPOSSIBLE SITUATION" THE SYRIANS FACE IN LEBANON. HE CHARGED THAT SHAMOUN AND GEMAYEL ARE

INTENT ON DIVIDING LEBANON OR RULING IT AUTOCRATICALLY. HE ALSO ARTICULATED AN OFT-HEARD CONSPIRACY THEORY THAT ISRAEL HAS HAD A HAND IN FOMENTING THE BEIRUT FIGHTING TO DISTRACT SYRIA FROM THE PEACE PROCESS AND KEEP IT PINNED DOWN MILITARILY IN LEBANON. DEFENDING SYRIA'S HEAVY HAND, SIAGE ASSERTED THAT SYRIAN FORCES MUST STRIKE BACK AT CHRISTIAN PROVOCATIONS TO PREVENT FURTHER ATTACKS ON SYRIAN SOLDIERS.

5. SYRIAN INTENTIONS OVER THE NEXT SEVERAL DAYS ARE UNCLEAR. DESPITE CHRISTIAN FEARS TO THE CONTRARY, IT SEEMS UNLIKELY THAT THE SYRIANS WOULD MOVE IN FORCE ON THE GROUND TO PUSH THE CHRISTIAN MILITIAS OUT OF EAST BEIRUT, FOR SEVERAL REASONS:
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(A) SYRIAN TROOPS HAVE NOT SHOWN THEMSELVES TO BE PARTICULARLY GOOD URBAN FIGHTERS, IN CONTRAST TO THE CHRISTIAN MILITIAS, AND THE ANTICIPATED LEVEL OF SYRIAN CASUALTIES WOULD LIKELY BE VIEWED AS PROHIBITIVE;

(B) A PROLONGED BATTLE IN BEIRUT WOULD BRING INTO QUESTION ON THE HOMEFRONT ASSAD'S LEBANON POLICY AND COULD LEAD TO A RISE IN DOMESTIC DISCONTENT;

(C) A HEAVY-HANDED SYRIAN APPROACH COULD GENERATE ARAB CRITICISM AND THEREBY WEAKEN THE ARAB LEAGUE VENEER COVERING SYRIA'S PRESENCE IN LEBANON.

6. THE PROSPECTS FOR MORE SHELLING AND SNIPING, IN THE PATTERN OF THE PAST FIVE DAYS, REMAIN HIGH. BOTH SIDES ARE STEELING THEMSELVES FOR FURTHER FIGHTING, AND THE SYRIANS HAVE APPARENTLY MOVED MORE REINFORCEMENTS INTO THE CITY FROM OTHER AREAS OF LEBANON. WHILE ASSAD MIGHT USE HIS TALKS WITH BOUTROS AS A RATIONALE FOR CALLING OFF HIS TROOPS IF HE BELIEVES THE CHRISTIANS HAVE "LEARNED" THEIR LESSON, THE SYRIAN PRICE FOR A TRUCE IS HIGH. LEBANESE PRESS REPORTS SUGGEST THAT A SYRIAN CEASEFIRE ORDER IS CONTINGENT ON SYRIAN TROOPS BEING ALLOWED TO DEPLOY IN FORCE IN THE CHRISTIAN SECTOR OF THE CITY. THESE CONDITIONS WILL BE ANATHEMA TO THE PHALANGE AND SHAMOUNISTS.
(CONFIDENTIAL)

7. LIBYA. PRESIDENT QADHAFI HAS CONCLUDED HIS FIVE-NATION TOUR OF EASTERN EUROPE WHICH TOOK HIM TO BULGARIA, CZECHOSLOVAKIA, HUNGARY, EAST GERMANY AND POLAND. EMBASSY TRIPOLI MADE THE FOLLOWING POINTS IN ITS PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT:
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(A) THE PURPOSE OF THE TRIP WAS TO "SOLIDIFY RELATIONS" WITH THE SOCIALIST BLOC AND MARKS A GREAT STEP TOWARD ALIGNING LIBYA WITH THE EAST.

(B) THE LENGTH OF THE VISIT SUGGESTS QADHAFI FEELS SECURE AT HOME.

(C) THE EXTENT OF THE VISIT REFLECTS HIS DISENCHANTMENT WITH AND SENSE OF REJECTION BY THE WEST.

(D) THE RESULTS OF THE TRIP APPEAR TO BE MORE POLITICAL THAN ECONOMIC. (CONFIDENTIAL) VANCE

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